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Monday Memo

Radio Marti:
an electronic
Bay of Pigs

Radio Marti, the Reagan administration's new propaganda station directed at Cuba, is a classical political pork barrel. According to the administration's righteous statements, Radio Marti is needed to bring the truth to the Cuban people. In fact, it is primarily a payoff to domestic political allies.

The pork barrel is a time-honored tradition in U.S. politics. Politicians win a share of public funds for construction projects of questionable utility in their home districts. The contractors, unions and other constituents who benefit from the infusion of federal funds in turn supply campaign funds and deliver votes to send politicians back to Washington for further dips into the federal pork barrel. Whether the projects are needed or benefit the taxpayers who foot the bill is usually irrelevant in this self-sustaining political process.

The central figure in the Radio Marti pork barrel is Jorge Mas Canosa, the wealthy president of a Miami-based engineering firm and militant opponent of the Castro regime. In the 1960's, he was an anti-Castro student activist in Havana, and after coming to the United States, he took part in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and was a commentator on Radio Swan, a clandestine CIA station that broadcast propaganda to Cuba.

In the 1980's, as a largely unknown contender for power in the complex and fragmented Cuban exile community in Florida, Mas Canosa established a political alliance with Florida's Republican Senator Paula Hawkins. During her victorious 1980 campaign, Mas Canosa became a close adviser to Hawkins and, along with members of his family and business associates, contributed generously to her political coffers.

In 1981, shortly after the elections of Hawkins and President Reagan, Mas Canosa became the chairman of the Cuban-American National Foundation, a political organization he formed with other wealthy Cuban exiles. The foundation's directors—mostly prominent Miami-area bankers and businessmen—pledged \$10,000 each for the avowed purpose of influencing the U.S. political process on issues related to Cuba and Cuban-Americans. The establishment of Radio Marti was on top of their agenda.

According to the *Miami Herald*, the foundation funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars through its political action committee, National Coalition for a Free Cuba, into the 1982 campaigns of "friendly voices" in Congress and to opponents of the congressmen they regarded as "friends of Fidel Castro." For example, the opponent of Representative Tim Wirth, Colorado Democrat and chairman of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee, received thousands of dollars in contributions in 1982. Wirth was an outspoken opponent of Radio Marti.

Senator Hawkins received tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions between 1980 and 1982 either from the PAC or from directors of the foundation acting as individuals, according to reports of the Federal Election Commission.

In 1981, President Reagan announced

plans for Radio Marti, and through the good offices of Senator Hawkins, Mas Canosa was appointed to the Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba. However, the enabling legislation for Radio Marti was blocked in the 97th Congress by an 11th-hour filibuster in the Senate, despite lobbying by Mas Canosa and his associates.

Senator Hawkins re-introduced the administration's bill for the station in the 98th Congress, and when the proposal again ran into opposition, she supplied considerable political muscle to finally win congressional approval in 1983.

During the 1983-84 reporting period, the national Coalition for a Free Cuba donated \$10,000 (the maximum amount allowed under federal law) to President Reagan's re-election campaign. Although Hawkins is not up for re-election until 1986, the coalition contributed another \$5,000 to her political war chest. Mas Canosa, his associates and members of their families supplemented the PAC's contribution to Hawkins with hefty individual donations, according to incomplete tabulations of the FEC for 1983-84.

The highly symbolic and widely publicized Radio Marti proposal was one of the few issues on which the diverse, often quarrelsome sectors of the large Cuban exile community in Florida agreed. Mas Canosa, who was virtually unknown prior to his appointment to the presidential commission, was ranked in a 1983 poll by the *Herald* as one of the "10 most influential Cuban Americans" in Miami.

Reagan's support for Radio Marti and hard-line foreign policy toward Castro enhanced the power of conservative Cuban exile factions, such as Mas Canosa's Cuban-American National Foundation. The political influence of the conservative factions had been eroded in the 1970's by more liberal Cuban-American groups that had proposed a dialogue with Castro and a reduction of tensions between the U.S. and Cuba.

President Reagan solidified the relationship in 1983 when he traveled to Miami to speak to the foundation. Before a wildly cheering audience of Cuban exiles and national television cameras, Reagan lavished praise on Mas Canosa and emphasized his support for Radio Marti. The President later appointed Mas Canosa as chairman of his permanent advisory board for Radio Marti. A top member of Senator Hawkins's Senate staff was appointed director of that board, and Senator Hawkins herself was appointed to the advisory council of the increasingly wealthy and influential Cuban-American National Foundation.

And in November 1984, Cuban-Americans turned out in droves to help re-elect President Reagan. Officials in Dade County, Fla., reported that unusually large numbers of Cubans became naturalized U.S. citizens shortly before the election so that they could vote for the man they affectionately call "El Machoso (the great Macho)." According to exit polls, 93% of the expanded Cuban electorate in Miami voted for the President.

Radio Marti, while repeatedly delayed, went on the air on May 20, Cuban Independence Day.

The vast majority of the broadcast staff now working to prepare the 14 hours of pro-

gramming that will be directed to Cuba each day are Cuban-Americans. Many of them were interviewed at the offices of the Cuban-American National Foundation and/or were recommended by foundation staff. Their annual salaries range from \$15,000 to \$41,000 depending on their education, experience and previous salaries.

There is nothing illegal or innately unethical about the Radio Marti pork barrel. In fact, many special interest groups in the United States have dipped much deeper and more frequently into the federal dole. But the American taxpayers are entitled to know that tens of millions of their tax dollars are being spent primarily for the political gain of a few people.

And like many pork barrels, Radio Marti is unnecessary and potentially harmful. Voice of America, the official radio service of the U.S. government, has been broadcasting to Cuba for two decades, and Miami commercial stations, some broadcasting shrill anti-Castro programming in Spanish, already are heard loud and clear in Havana.

Further, Cuba has angrily promised to respond by similarly broadcasting to the United States. Many in Congress and commercial broadcasters fear that a vigorous Cuban response could seriously disrupt the domestic U.S. radio system. "We are heading for electronic Bay of Pigs," said Representative Henry Gonzalez of Texas.

At best, Radio Marti is a waste of taxpayers' money. At worst, it could lead to radio warfare and a dangerous escalation of tension between Cuba and the United States. In neither case will it be a substitute for meaningful policies and actions badly needed to resolve serious differences between the countries.

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